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State Representative • Serving the 75th Assembly District

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All Work Is Meaningful

Madison – Over the last few years, our area has become all-too-familiar with severe weather. Tornadoes, damaging winds, and flooding have caused enormous damage to our homes and communities. Although the struggle to return to normalcy after these events can take time, we are so fortunate to have extremely professional men and women who work around the clock to restore our power, repair our roofs, and drain our basements.

As thousands of people lost power during the last storm event, I spent the evening with family members working to get the lights back on to my father-in-law's farm. As most people know, cows don't take a break when the electricity goes out. After locating a generator and getting it to the barn, it was clear that nobody was completely comfortable jerry-rigging (as I like to call it) the wiring to the barn, since it was not set up to receive a generator. Fortunately, a family friend, who is also an electrician, was available to stop out and see that it was done correctly and safely, and the cows got milked at 11:30pm that night. But what would have happened if an electrician wasn't available?

Whether you're recovering from a storm, doing general repair, or undertaking new construction – it's getting harder and harder to find the skilled laborers needed to get the job done. According to the Manpower Staffing Group, the trades (electricians, carpenters, welders, bricklayers, plasterers, plumbers, masons and more) are the hardest jobs to fill and have been the #1 vacancy since 2010. This is due to a combination of seasoned employees retiring and young people not entering this line of work. Although we can't stop our workforce from aging, we can do more to show young people the opportunities that exist within the trades.

In May of 2018, I passed a bill that allows qualified high school seniors to start an adult apprenticeship program while still in school, enabling them to complete the program sooner. A full apprenticeship program, unlike a youth apprenticeship program, involves classroom instruction and in-depth, hands-on training in a chosen career. I am happy to say that the first four students in the state have just signed up to get a jump start on their careers – two will work with electrical companies, one with an engineering firm, and one with a solar power company.

Students who wish to get a jump start on their college education are encouraged to take advanced placement classes or actual college credits during high school -- why shouldn't the same opportunity be afforded to students who wish to go into the trades? We need linemen, electricians, and plumbers just as much as we need workers with business degrees. By offering students a pathway into the trades, we are once again reaffirming that all work is meaningful.